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ABSTRACT

Because of the difficulty of current and emerging school problems, the assistant principal needs to be knowledgeable in such diverse areas as accounting, school finance, school law, student rights, book censorship, and women's equity. In addition, it is necessary that the assistant principal be involved in curriculum improvement, evaluations, extracurricular activities, goal setting, and competency testing. Although problems of attendance and discipline are important, the assistant principal must be careful to delegate responsibilities in these areas, when possible, and not become bogged down in paper work. The assistant principal must have a clear picture of his or her duties or responsibilities set down in a comprehensive up-to-date job description. Survival of the assistant principal depends on attitude toward the job, including clear personal goals and initiative. Assistant principals ought to become familiar with literature on the management team, reduction in force, and student activities. A monthly meeting of area assistant principals might be useful. Although problems of discipline, attendance, violence, and vandalism are important phases of the assistant principal's job, they should not overshadow other phases of administration. (JM)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

by Ralph W. Landmeier

EA 011 560

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators (OASSA) and the officers of your professional organization, I welcome you to this Assistant Principals' Conference. In general, I find assistant principals very valuable people -especially on days like today, when mine makes it possible for me to be here. I would like to thank the Assistant Principal Committee, who planned this conference, for its invitation to me to lead off your program. Also, I would like to acknowledge your Assistant Principal representative-at-large on the Board of Directors, Jim Wright, from Fremont Ross High School. Jim has been a valuable member of the Board of Directors and he has done an excellent job of leading the Assistant Principals' cause.

So that I have a general picture of the participants in this conference, let me take a minute to ask a few questions. How many of you serve as the only assistant in your school? How many are senior high assistants? ...Junior high? ...Middle school? How many are from districts with more than one high school? How many of you are part-time assistants? How many are ex-coaches? This gives you and me a picture of the group. In large districts with several high schools, very large individual schools with several assistants, or in very small schools, the job of assistant is remarkably different.

One day, back in 1976, in frustration, I wrote for the American Secondary Education magazine what I considered a humorous article that described a new type of administrative structure that I needed in order to cope with the current and emerging school problems. Now, four years later, it isn't

funny anymore. Those problems have not gone away, but have gotten worse. Maybe, in your position in your school, you don't deal directly with some of the problems. But, as a principal, this is the type of help I needed then, and it is the type that I am desperate for now.

My number-one assistant needs a degree in accounting and financal school law as well as expertise in finding budget loopholes. Over the years, the State Auditors have not made our jobs any easier with Circular 1550 and the myriad of interpretations. Are you up to date on the activities funding regulations and the specific activities funds in your school? Beyond that, do you know the budgets for the various departments and activities in your building? Do you help determine budgets and assist in administering them?

Another assistant I plea for is a budding young lawyer to keep the staff and me out of legal entanglements and/or to defend us should we err. I do not think an hour passes without some decision which involves legal implications. Of course, all of you are working daily with due process and hearings for suspensions. But, what about your being the good samaritan who drives that sick girl home in your car since her parents work and she never turned in an emergency medical form? --After all, you have known her and her parents for years -nothing could go wrong! (By the way, do you have emergency medical forms for all your students? How about your staff?) How about the coach who gave her keys to a parent of a team member so the team could practice while she was out of town? Isn't the assistant in charge of activities? Then, there is that "fun affair," -the powder-puff football game. That's another story....

I also requested, four years ago, that I have a muscular assistant to protect me and be efficient in disarming students without violating their civil rights. I don't know what happens in your school, but we expelled a student about a month ago for leaving his auto-shop class, retrieving a shotgun from his car, bringing it into the classroom and threatening to kill the boy who had been teasing him. Some of our urban schools are suffering from far more violence than most of us are, but violence is a problem everywhere. Everyone of you could swap horror stories about what happened in your school and, of course, that is one of the purposes of having all of you together here for this conference. Maybe you can figure out how to avoid what has happened elsewhere.

At that time, I also needed an assistant who was an expert on dirty books and magazines. (That doesn't sound quite right!) Most of you have had parents complain about material in textbooks or library books; some of you have been on materials-selection committees or review committees. Morals have relaxed quite a bit over 4 years, but I don't believe we are ready for Deep Throat in our health classes. If you do not have criteria and procedures for materials selection, I suggest that you take the initiative for formulating policies.

At that time, I asserted that I needed a female assistant to assure that we male chauvinists were not conspiring to perpetuate the female image. This problem has deepened with the implementation of Title IX and the advent of affirmative action. Are provisions for girls' athletics equal to those for boys' athletics in your school? Are the budgets and coaches' salaries within acceptable guidelines? Are you, as an assistant, assuring equal access to all courses offered? Are you assigning teachers -male and

female- to equal duties? Are you disciplining boys and girls in the same manner? Then, for the clincher, can you prove it? If not, why not? And, what are you doing about it? As a side note, there are fewer females in administration now than there were 10 years ago. However, I see this trend changing as school districts are forced to seek qualified female administrators. And, where is the entry job? The assistant principalship with rapid promotions to the top positions? Attendance at these meetings will involve an equal number of men and women in the future.

Of course, you realize I am not proposing this many assistants in any one school. I am stating that it is your job, an important part of your job, to be well versed in all of these special areas whether your intent is to be a career assistant or to move into a principalship. Your knowledge is essential to both career functions.

I could go on for quite a while about all of the different areas of administration and your involvement in each. It is necessary that you be involved in the important traditional areas of curriculum improvement, evaluations, extra-curricular activities, setting goals and objectives, competency testing (when, or if, it ever is required in Ohio), public relations, scheduling, and on and on. You can look at the table of contents of any educational administration textbook and find the traditional duties and responsibilities which you must share.

Now, you will ask, "What happened to problems of attendance and discipline, the traditional dirty jobs of the assistant?" Sure, they are important, but you are not going to lick them alone. Here is where planning, efficient use of time, and delegation of responsibilities assume importance. Is your time worth spending the day routinely recording absences, tardies, late

entries, early releases, cuts, making routine attendance phone calls, and writing suspension letters? It is a comfortable, non-threatening way to spend the day but, in my mind, a complete waste.

I am well aware of budgetary problems in many districts, including my own, where funds are not provided for adequate secretarial help. But, examine your alternatives for accomplishing these routine tasks. Delegate as much as possible to students, secretaries, parent volunteers, and teachers. Plan to avoid problems by developing supervisory schedules to cover trouble spots. Create a stock of form letters for suspensions, class cutting, discipline. There are many efficient shortcuts.

One reason you are here, of course, is that you are looking for workable solutions to continuous problems. None will work perfectly but, maybe, with a combination of ideas from your peers, you can free the necesarry time to branch out into new areas and use your time more constructively.

I would also suggest at this point that you need to have a clear picture of your duties and responsibilities and what authority you have. Sitting down with your principal to work out a comprehensive workable job description is your best route. Hopefully, you already have a job description. But, is it up to date? Is it workable? Does it imply impossible tasks such as eliminating smoking, having perfect student attendance and no in-school fighting. There are sample job descriptions available to you. If you think yours is a good one, please send a copy to the OASSA Office so someone else can use it for a starting point. Of course, don't forget the last item on any job description, "All other duties assigned by the Principal."

I realize that I am addressing an elite, unique group of administrators. You are interested in improving. Your principal is interested in your professional growth, or he wouldn't be covering for you today. And, your board of education is interested in your growth, or they wouldn't foot the bill for today's meeting.

I find it difficult to inspire and stimulate you since your job is miserable at best, and impossible at worst. Your survival depends on your attitude toward the job. Face up to these questions: How did you get where you are? Why are you there? How do you view your job? What are your personal goals? Where do you hope to be in ten years? What are your chances of making it? If you don't know what port you are steering for, no wind is favorable to you. Why are you an assistant principal? Were you tired of teaching? Did you desire a position where you could be a missionary and help the burn-outs? Are you training to be a principal? ...assistant superintendent? ...superintendent? Did you need more money? Did the opportunity just happen --were you in the right place at the right time?

None of these are "bad" or "good" in themselves. The important question is, "What kind of assistant are you?" How important are you to the school system? Are you caught up in the attendance/discipline cycle? Are you initiating new ideas and striving to be of more value? Do you enthusiastically take on new special projects? Do you assume responsibility willingly? There are many questions that you can ask yourself. You can be the most important cog in the wheel, and it is up to you to see that it happens. Remember, following another is going to leave you behind.

The OASSA, in a cooperative project within the Ohio Congress of School Administrators, developed, endorsed and distributed a position paper on the Management Team. This is mainly a position for administrators (principals and superintendents) and boards of education. However, I urge all of you to read the booklet and apply the Team concept to the management of your building. Many of the duties I outlined above, as well as your position within the school, can be clarified and strengthened through the Team approach.

The same group of administrative organizations is developing a position paper on Reduction in Force (RIF). Many districts are forced to reduce staff due to enrollment decreases, budget problems, or court orders. Who goes? That's right, likely you, the assistant. The rationale is that one principal is enough in a building. Cleveland did so just this last spring with disasterous results. This policy on RIFing would strengthen your position with your board of education. Predetermined would be which administrator would be let go, where he would go, and how he would return to his original position. Otherwise, regardless of experience or training, you may be out without even a teaching job.

There are many publications coming out of our OASSA state office that can be of value to you in your day-to-day operation. These are "Legal Notes," "Update," "Legislative Report," and "Activities Digest." I have to put in a plug here for the OAA (Ohio Activities Association), through which the "Activities Digest" is published. Up until this year, OASSA published some news of activities programs and ran some workshops on activities with your membership dues paying the tab. This year, the Ohio Activities

Association was formed by your OASSA Board of Directors to better provide for the needs of the schools' activities programs and to lessen the financial burden of our membership. Many schools have joined this organization already, and we hope to have most of the Ohio schools participating in the years to come. The information you receive is most valuable, and the workshops can really provide a useful service to your staff and you. If you are responsible for the activities program in your schools, I suggest that you attend an Activities Directors' Workshop or a Club Advisors' Workshop. There are even meetings for National Honor Society advisors and cheerleaders' advisors, and they sponsor cheerleader camps in the summer and drill team competitions in the spring. Check when you return to your school to see if you are a member.

You are, obviously, interested in attending conferences with other assistants or you wouldn't be here, but have you ever thought that a monthly meeting may be possible right in your area? Ross Fleming (Executive Director) would be very helpful in setting up such a group, and one of the members on your program here today, David Rumpf of Cuhahoga Falls High School, has had experience with a very successful group of assistants in the Akron area. I am sure he would be most willing to assist you.

I see that your program for tomorrow will center on legal affairs. Have you been to a legal seminar this year? Always, after attending one, I am amazed that I know so little about law and the realities of school life. Of course, Ross and John (OASSA staff) are as close to you as your phone and would likely be able to answer your questions on the spot. If necessary, they can consult with Rick Mann (OASSA lawyer) and call you back. Ross also would drive to assist you or represent you at a hearing or just to give you advice on how to handle a sticky situation.

I would also like to put in a plug for the upcoming summer and fall conferences. As President-Elect, I will need to preside, and I really like to preside over someone! This is an excellent turnout this morning. It is discouraging to prepare what you think is an inspiring and provocative program, and then have only a handful of people show up. Talk up the Association and these meetings with your colleagues, and see if you can fill a section of motel rooms from your county or city. There is nothing I would like better than to have the assistant principals outnumber the principals at this coming summer conference. -And, you can't use the excuse that you have to stay at school to mind the shop! Better than coming alone, come as part of your Management Team -you, the principal, and the superintendent, since this summer we will join forces with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) for the first time in an educational conference. The superintendent cannot very well turn down your request and then approve his own.....

In closing today, I wish you a very successful conference. I hope that you will take back to your schools many useful ideas to make your individual jobs easier and to make your school climate better for education. Sure, problems of discipline, attendance, violence, and vandalism are important phases of your job, but do not permit them to dominate your world. Keep them in perspective. You should want to be involved in all phases of administration. Remember, you can't win them all! Good luck!

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